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EIU 4192-098-099: Constructions of Youth in Contemporary Cinema

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**Film and Society:
Constructions of Youth in Contemporary Cinema**
EIU 4192—Spring, 2004

3:30 – 6:50 Tuesdays, Coleman 3170 (Section 098)
Course Listserv: 4192a@eiu.edu
Instructor: Tim Engles
Phone: 581-6316 (it's usually easier to reach me by e-mail: cftde@eiu.edu)
Office hours (Coleman 3831): Tues/Thurs, 11:00 – 12:00 and by appointment

Required Texts:

David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson, *Film Art*, 6th Edition
Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*, 5th Edition
William H. Phillips, *Film: An Introduction*
Leonard Quart and Albert Auster, *American Film and Society Since 1945*, 2nd Edition
Instructor's Course Packet, Copy Express, Student Union (not available yet . . .)

The job of young people is not, as we sometimes assume, to go to high school. It is to imagine and begin to construct their lives. They need to understand both their own interests and abilities and the society of which they are a part. And they need to make a self that makes sense for the times in which they live. This isn't easy.
(Thomas Hines)

Bildungsroman: A novel that recounts the development (psychological and sometimes spiritual) of an individual from childhood to maturity, to the point at which the protagonist recognizes his or her place in the world. (Ross Murfin)

Course Policies and Procedures

As noted more fully below, full class participation and steady attendance are crucial to your success and interest in this course. We will examine cinematic depictions of adolescent experience, studying the historic development of the relatively recent idea of a "teenager," and examining the dialogues that occur between adolescent audiences and films about adolescents. We will work to "read" film as closely as we've been trained to read literature. I know from teaching such courses before that some of you will resist this requirement, dismissing efforts to think more deeply about movies with such comments (or thoughts) as, "Come on, it's just a movie!" Such thoughts mostly come from a lifetime of watching movies for entertainment. However, as we will discover, how movies work, and how they function in society, are very complex and interesting issues.

We will take both a “formal” and a sociological/anthropological approach to our material, considering along the way such questions as these: (again) how do movies work? why are there so many movies about teenagers? Is there a genre of such films that corresponds to the *Bildungsroman* in literature? Are they all aimed at teenagers? Are they realistic? If not, what are they trying to tell us (or sell us)? Do films about teenagers accurately reflect teen culture, or do they help to create it? What can films demonstrate or reveal about adolescent experience? Finally, how do these experiences vary in different social and national contexts?

Note that the usual suspects will certainly enter the room: race, class, gender, and sexuality, and most of what comes with them. Some of the works we’ll study contain a good deal of controversial themes, “bad” language, and strong sexual content. If for any reason you strongly object to such material or otherwise find it upsetting, you should consider taking another course. If you decide to stay, do your best to maintain an open mind, to reconsider where your own values and judgments are coming from, and to understand more fully the circumstances of others before judging them.

Grading:

Response Essays: 20%
Presentation: 20%
Final Paper: 30%
Participation and Attendance: 10%
Final Exam: 20%

Regarding Reading: Because many of our readings this semester are difficult (and because they will form the basis for the final exam!), you must give them more than a quick skimming over. Instead of wolfing them down right before class, budget your time throughout each week, setting aside enough time, and more often than once a week, to read carefully—take notes as you read, then decide for yourself, before coming to class, what each author is trying to describe and bring to light.

Response Papers: Unless I tell you differently, the response paper assignment for each week will be the same: after carefully studying both of the week’s readings, choose one to write a two-part, two-page paper about. In the first part, summarize the main points of the reading—avoid as you do so oversimplifying the reading’s main points. In the second part, discuss a connection that you see between something specific in the reading, and something specific in the last film we saw. Search for **insights** here—how did the reading help you understand anything about the film, or see it differently? If you want to ask me questions about the readings via e-mail (or in my office), fire away. Also, you’re welcome and encouraged to ask questions to the rest of the class about the readings, and to comment on our films and readings, over the class listserv.

Classroom Environment: In class, I expect all of you to participate in discussions (class participation will be figured into your final grade), and to attend regularly. The best way to demonstrate that you are an active, engaged, and interested reader and viewer is by contributing regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to

what everyone else has to say. If you have questions, no matter how simple or complicated, go ahead and ask me, either in class or via e-mail—chances are that other people will have the same question. I do not plan to lecture in this class; I want us to contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment.

Conferences: An especially effective way to do well in this course is to talk with me about your work in my office (CH 3831). I will be there and available to consult with you at the hours I've specified on the front of the syllabus. You do not need to make an appointment if you wish to talk with me during my listed office hours. If these hours are inconvenient for you, I am also available by appointment: let me know if you want to make one, and we'll agree on a time that is convenient for both of us.

E-mail Activity: Because I will subscribe you to a class listserv (also known as a "discussion list"), enrollment in this class requires an e-mail account, and I strongly recommend that you use your free EIU account or another commercial account (Yahoo, Hotmail, and other free accounts are too limited for professional purposes, and they often reject listserv messages). E-mail is the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all questions and comments.

Again, using an e-mail account frequently is crucial for this course. Check your e-mail several times a week for messages regarding this class, and keep in mind that regular, thoughtful contributions to our class listserv will improve your class participation grade. If you do not send an e-mail message to me (cftde@eiu.edu) by 5 p.m. on Friday, January 16, I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you. In your message, (1) explain which course of mine you are in (EIU 4192); (2) describe yourself in whatever ways you choose, including your career aspirations; and (3) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with the course policies and procedures that you are presently reading.

Academic honesty: I expect you to act honestly and do your own work in this class, and so does Eastern Illinois University. Basically, dishonesty of any sort in this class will result in a failing grade in the course. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the English Department's policy on plagiarism: "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—'The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work' (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office."

EIU 4192: DAILY SCHEDULE

Note: This schedule may change; any changes will be announced in advance. Reading assignments are to be completed by the dates on which they appear on the syllabus. BE SURE to bring the appropriate handout, course packet, or book to class if a reading assignment is listed for that day; students who show up without a copy of the day's reading assignment will be marked absent. **[a complete schedule of readings and viewings will be included in the course packet]**

T JAN 13 Introductions (to the course and to each other)

Film-screening: *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, director, 1955)

F JAN 16, 5 p.m.: **deadline for e-mail message to Dr. Engles.** In your message,

- since I teach several courses, explain which one you're in (EIU 4192)
- describe yourself in whatever ways you choose, including your career aspirations
- After reading the above "course policies and procedures" carefully on your own, write a statement in this e-mail saying that you have read and agree with them (also, if you disagree with any of them, describe those)
- finally, as with ALL e-mail messages, write your name at the end of it, as you would in a letter

T JAN 20 Readings for today: Mari Margaret McLean, "It's a Blackboard Jungle Out There: The Impact of Media and Film on the Public's Perceptions of Violence in Schools" (handout); Phillips, *Film: An Introduction*, Chapter 1, "Mise en Scène"

Film-screening: *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955)

T JAN 27 Readings: Quart, *American Film and Society*, Chapter 3, "The Fifties"; and . .

Film-screening: *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (Todd Solondz, 1996)

T FEB 3 Readings:

Film-screenings: *Killing Us Softly III* (Jean Kilbourne, 1999); *Two Lies* (Pam Tom, 1989)

T FEB 10 Readings:

Film-screening: *River's Edge* (Tim Hunter, 1986)

T FEB 17 Readings: Henry Giroux, "Slacking Off: Border Youth and Postmodern Education"; and . .

Film-screenings: *The Smell of Burning Ants* (Jay Rosenblatt, 1994); *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre, 1998)

T FEB 24 Readings: Ward Churchill on *Dances with Wolves?* And . . .

Film-screening: *Dangerous Minds* (John N. Smith, 1995)

T MAR 2 Readings: Richard Dyer, "Lighting for Whiteness"; Henry Giroux, "White Noise: Racial Politics and the Pedagogy of Whiteness"
Film-screening: *Fresh* (Boaz Yakin, 1994)

T MAR 9 Readings: Selections from Niobe Way, *Everyday Courage: The Lives and Stories of Urban Teenagers*; and. . .
Film-screening: *Zebrahead* (Anthony Drazan, 1992)

MARCH 15-19 SPRING BREAK!

T MAR 23 Readings: David Roediger, "Elvis, Wiggers, and Crossing Over to Nonwhiteness"
Film-screening: *My Tutor Friend* (Kim Gyeong-hyeong, 2003) or *Manner Zero* . . .

T MAR 30 Readings: Selections from Anthony C. Y. Leong, *Korean Cinema: The New Hong Kong*; and . . .
Film-screening: *Take Care of My Cat* (Jeong Jae-eun, 2001)

T APR 6 Readings:
Film-screening: *Friend* (Kwak Kyung-taek, 2001)

T APR 13 Readings:
Film-screening: *Sweet Sixteen* (Ken Loach, 2002)

T APR 20 Readings:
Film-screening: *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling, 1995)

T APR 27 Reading: Gayle Wald, "*Clueless* in the Neocolonial World Order"

- Final paper due at the beginning of class
- Discussion of take-home final exam
- Tearful, Heartfelt Good Byes, etc.

MAY 3-7 FINAL EXAMS

EIU 4192: DAILY SCHEDULE

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JAN 13/15 Introductions (to the course and to each other)

Film-screening: *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, director, 1955)

F JAN 16 (Thursday class, Monday, JAN 19), 5 p.m.: **deadline for e-mail message to Dr. Engles.** In your message,

- since I teach several courses, explain which one you're in (EIU 4192)
- describe yourself in whatever ways you choose, including your career aspirations
- After reading the above "course policies and procedures" carefully on your own, write a statement in this e-mail saying that you have read and agree with them (also, if you disagree with any of them, describe those)
- finally, as with ALL e-mail messages, write your name at the end of it

JAN 20/22 Readings for today: Mari Margaret McLean, "It's a Blackboard Jungle Out There: The Impact of Media and Film on the Public's Perceptions of Violence in Schools" (handout); Phillips, *Film: An Introduction*, Chapter 1, "*Mise en Scène*"

Film-screening: *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955)

JAN 27/29 Readings: Quart, *American Film and Society*, Chapter 3, "The Fifties"; Jerrold Simmons, "The Censoring of *Rebel Without a Cause*"

Film-screening: *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (Todd Solondz, 1996)

FEB 3/5 Readings: David Walsh, "*Welcome to the Dollhouse*: Abandon all hope ..."; Naomi Wolf, excerpt from *The Beauty Myth*; Lois-Ann Yamanaka, "When Asian Eyes Are Smiling"

Film-screenings: *Killing Us Softly III* (Jean Kilbourne, 1999); *Two Lies* (Pam Tom, 1989)

FEB 10/12 Readings: Judith Lorber, "The Social Construction of Gender"; Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Film-screening: *The Smell of Burning Ants* (Jay Rosenblatt, 1994); *River's Edge* (Tim Hunter, 1986)

FEB 17/19 Readings: Charles R. Acland, "The Body by the River: Youth Movies and the Adult Gaze"; R. L. Rutsky, "Being Keanu"

Film-screening: *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre, 1998)

FEB 24/26 Reading: Leo Zonn & Dick Winchell, "*Smoke Signals*: Locating Sherman Alexie's Narratives of American Indian Identity"

Formal Analysis Paper Due at the Beginning of Class

Film-screening: *Dangerous Minds* (John N. Smith, 1995)

MAR 2/4 Readings: Henry Giroux, "White Noise: Racial Politics and the Pedagogy of Whiteness"; Richard Dyer, "Lighting for Whiteness"

Film-screening: *Fresh* (Boaz Yakin, 1994)

MAR 9/11 Readings: Selections from Niobe Way, *Everyday Courage: The Lives and Stories of Urban Teenagers*; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, "Natural Mentors and Adolescent Resiliency: A Study with Urban Youth"

Film-screening: *Zebrahead* (Anthony Drazan, 1992)

MARCH 15-19 SPRING BREAK!

MAR 23/25 Reading: Selections from Thandeka, *Learning to be White*; David Roediger, "Elvis, Wiggers, and Crossing Over to Nonwhiteness"

Film-screening: *Take Care of My Cat* (Jeong Jae-eun, 2001)

MAR 30/APR 1 Readings: David Desser, "New Kids on the Street: The Pan-Asian Youth Film"; Selections from Anthony C. Y. Leong, *Korean Cinema: The New Hong Kong*

Proposal (300-400 words) for Final Research Paper Due by the

Beginning of Class; film-screening: *Friend* (Kwak Kyung-taek, 2001)

APR 6/8 Readings: Jillian Sandell, "Reinventing Masculinity: The Spectacle of Male Intimacy in the Films of John Woo"; Rick Curnutte, "Passages of Time: Motifs of Past, Present, Future in Contemporary Korean Films"

12th Week: *Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal* (in-class, 30 mins.)

Film-screening: *My Tutor Friend* (Kyeong-hyeong Kim, 2003)

APR 13/15 Readings: Stephanie Zacharek, "There's Something about Teenage Comedy" (handout); Meery Lee & Reed Larson, "The Korean 'Examination' Hell: Long Hours of Studying, Distress, and Depression"

Film-screening: *Sweet Sixteen* (Ken Loach, 2002)

APR 20/22 Readings: David Walsh, "Filmmaking and American Social Life"; Roger Bromley, "Sweet Sixteen"

Research Paper Due at the Beginning of Class

Film-screening: *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling, 1995)

APR 27/29 Reading: Angela Curran, "Consuming Doubts: Gender, Class, and Consumption in *Ruby in Paradise* and *Clueless*"; film-screening: *The Merchants of Cool* (Rachel Dretzin & Barak Goodman, 2001)

- Final paper due at the beginning of class

- Discussion of take-home final exam, tearful, Heartfelt Good Byes, etc.

MAY 3-7 FINAL EXAMS